

any reference to me, as the absurd error above quoted shows ; and his generalizations are as full of mistakes “as an egg’s full of meat !”

The Doctor having thus broken faith, I, on my return to England, published my “Notes” in the ‘Annals and Magazine of Natural History,’ at the urgent request of my lamented friends, Strickland, Sir W. Jardine, and the brothers Gray, who kindly said the information I possessed was too valuable to be lost.

Cinnyris minima. This species was included in the miniature figures already alluded to, and was the subject of special search, being required by my dear old friend Blyth. I can well remember my delight when I found it (in my time not at all uncommon) round Point Pedro, whence I immediately sent it to Blyth, who confirmed my identification.

I see Cuming’s name frequently alluded to, in the work under discussion, as the authority for certain birds from Ceylon. I presume this is my old friend the late Hugh Cuming, of conchological fame. Was he ever in Ceylon? I doubt it ; and if my memory does not play me very false, he himself told me he never had been there. He was well known as a dealer, and purchased other things besides shells, if they came together. He paid no attention to birds ; and I should be very loth to accept a “habitat” on the ground that Cuming had stated it.

With these remarks I stop, for the present, awaiting the arrival of the last portion of this valuable addition to our ornithological literature.

Noumea, January 1880.

XXVII.—*On the Habits of the Honey-bird* (Indicator).

By E. F. SANDEMAN.

[It is always of interest to have accounts of such strange phenomena as those presented to us in the habits of the Honey-guides confirmed, however well known they may be. We have therefore no hesitation in transferring to the pages

of 'The Ibis' the following extract from Mr. Sandeman's 'Eight Months in an Ox-Waggon,' in which the story of this bird's strange achievements is well and graphically told. The scene of the adventure was near Loses Kop, in the Transvaal, to the east of the Lydenberg (where the road to Delagoa Bay descends from the Berg into the Low Country, or Bush-Veldt), in June 1878.—EDD.]

A SMALL grey bird, with a reddish beak, the size of a Sparrow, had flown alongside and round the waggon for the last mile of our trek, making a shrill hissing cry, and sometimes almost flying in the faces of the drivers; and I noticed that the boys were regarding it with peculiar attention, and talking among themselves in reference to it.

On asking what caused the unusual interest of the boys in, to all appearance, a very common-place little bird, it was explained that this little insignificant visitor was the far-famed Honey-bird. Often and often had we heard tales of its marvellous instinct in pointing out the nests of wild honey, but we had always received them with a considerable portion of disbelief as traveller's tales.

As soon as the oxen were outspanned and the boys at liberty, three of them, armed with buckets, spades, and hatchets, set off towards the bird, which had flown to a neighbouring tree as soon as it perceived that our attention was successfully attracted. A. and myself, to whom it was as strange an adventure as it was novel, accompanied the boys. As soon as we reached the tree the little fellow had perched on, it flitted to the next, and then on again when we came up. Once it took such a long flight that we were unable to follow it.

The bird, however, after waiting for us a short time in vain, came flying back, uttering its shrill cry to let us know its whereabouts.

As if it had been warned by this not to proceed too far ahead of us, our guide now took very short flights, and, if there was no tree to rest on, took short circles in the air until we came up to him.

For nearly a mile this was kept up, and as the way grew more difficult and the bushes more dense, our own faith in

the bird was rapidly giving place to irritation at what began to look very like a trick of the others at the expense of our inexperience.

However, the boys seemed so genuinely astonished at our doubts, that we still followed on.

At last the bird stopped altogether in a small clump of some dozen mimosa-trees, all growing within a few feet of one another.

When we came up to it, instead of, as heretofore, flying off in a straight line, it just flitted on to an opposite tree, remained there a few moments, and then back to its previous position. This was its signal that the nest was close at hand. The boys examined the trunks of the trees round most carefully, but could find no opening where the nest could by any possibility be situated. The bird grew more and more angry and indignant at what it evidently considered our extreme stupidity, and flapped its little wings and redoubled the shrill cries which it had ceased to utter while leading us to the spot. At last, losing all patience, it actually settled on a piece of the stem of one of the trees it had been persistently flitting backwards and forwards in front of. The boys now, paying more attention to this particular tree, perceived just above where the bird had perched a small hole, and round it a kind of cement. While we were watching a bee flew out, which made it certain that the nest was within the trunk. The driver of Woodward's waggon, who was an old hand at the work, at once climbed up the tree with a hatchet, and under his direction the others collected armfuls of dried grass. Taking a large handful of this he lighted it, and then struck with the hatchet at the mouth of the narrow hole.

At the first blow a quantity of mud, wax, and decayed wood fell to the ground, with which the bees had skilfully walled up a large portion of the decayed wood. Out swarmed a cloud of bees, and now his burning grass came into operation. As quickly as they flew out their wings were singed in the flames, and they dropped helpless to the ground. A. and myself had retreated to a safe distance from the tree; but the boys stood close up, hardly caring if they were stung or not.

In a very few minutes all the occupants of the nest were destroyed ; but new comers were constantly arriving, which made close quarters any thing but pleasant. Not much cutting was necessary to lay bare a large portion of the combs, which were laid horizontally across the entire width of the hollow portion of the tree. The upper combs are always the freshest, and therefore the best, so we at once set to work to fill our three buckets with them. When these were all full to the top, there was still enough honey left to fill at least another three or four ; for the combs went down to the very bottom of the tree, as we discovered by forcing down a long stick. There was already more than enough honey for all our wants, and the boys were confident that they could obtain fresh supplies in the same manner as often as they cared to follow the birds, so we left the remainder where it was for the bees which survived our felonious attack. Before leaving we carefully fixed a comb filled with honey on the nearest bush, and our late guide flew down and commenced his well-earned repast as soon as we had turned our backs on the spot. The Kaffirs would much prefer not to take any honey at all, than depart with their spoil and not leave a portion for the bird. They firmly believe that if they thus defraud the bird of its just rights, it will follow them up, and at a future time, instead of leading them to honey, will entice them into the lair of a lion, or to a nest in which some deadly snake lies concealed.

It is impossible to explain the marvellous characteristic of the Honey-bird, without crediting it with powers of reasoning which are almost human. No one who has once witnessed the manner in which the bird will persistently follow a waggon for miles, but will leave it and join the first man or men who leave the trek and evince a disposition to follow, can for an instant believe that the bird betrays the nest unconsciously. How the birds have acquired the knowledge that men desire honey, and that they have the power to gratify the desire by forcing open the hidden hoards—how they calculate, as they assuredly do, upon themselves reaping the benefit of being accomplices and instigators of the theft, and how they have learnt to lose

their natural fear of mankind, and trust themselves almost within his grasp—how they are taught their various devices for attracting man's attention and leading him to the spots where the bees have made their nests, are questions which, perpetually discussed amongst those who, although not scientific naturalists, have spent their lives observing nature, can never be answered or explained.

XXVIII.—*Notes of a Collecting-trip in the New Hebrides, the Solomon Islands, New Britain, and the Duke-of-York Islands.* By E. L. C. LAYARD. *With Remarks* by E. L. LAYARD, F.Z.S. &c.

AT the close of last year I was asked by Lieut. Richards, R.N., commanding H.M.S. 'Renard,' if I would like to go with him to the above-named islands, if, as was probable, he should be ordered there. Of course I would. I had seen the illustrations of the Rev. G. Brown's birds in the 'P. Z. S.,' and longed to see the birds themselves. In the beginning of last April I received a letter from Lieut. Richards, dated in Sydney, and saying he would very shortly arrive in Noumea and I must be ready. The first thing was to take my favourite collecting-gun to the French Government armoury and have the locks thoroughly overhauled and oiled. Then came the loading of cartridges, and getting together scalpels, arsenical soap, &c.; and on the 19th April we left Noumea, under orders to meet the commodore in Blanche Bay, New Britain, on the 25th May. The weather was very bad, and all the small craft had run for shelter into various little sheltered bays. Something has gone wrong with the usual south-east wind this year. It was at least two months late, and when it did blow, only came in heavy fitful squalls, lasting for four or five days, then succeeded by heavy rain and the north-west wind. It was continually raining during the whole of my excursion, though it was supposed to be the healthy and dry season. This abnormal weather had a curious effect upon the birds. They ought to have recovered from their moulting and have been in